

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION

ACTION
Agenda Item D-5
May 22, 2000

Recommendation:

- That the Council approve the Center for 21st Century Media as a second program of distinction at Western Kentucky University.
- That the Council award \$500,000 to Western Kentucky University from the Regional University Excellence Trust Fund to support creation of the Center.

Background and Rationale:

The Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 (HB 1) created the Regional University Excellence Trust Fund to implement the goal of having six Kentucky comprehensive universities with at least one nationally recognized program of distinction at each institution. The Council approved WKU's first program of distinction-- the Applied Research and Technology Program-- at the July 13, 1998, Council meeting. WKU indicated then that it would later propose journalism and broadcasting as a second program of distinction and budgeted its first program of distinction request to accommodate this plan.

Program Summary

The proposed Center for 21st Century Media will expand and deepen the teaching, research, and outreach of WKU's nationally prominent School of Journalism and Broadcasting. Specifically, the Center will increase training and other practice-oriented opportunities for students in advertising, public relations, newscasting, and related fields. It will emphasize the new areas of electronic publishing and the Internet and prepare students for rapid change in and convergence of modern media. The Center will boost financial and logistical support to WKU's internationally recognized debate program. It will establish the Kentucky High School Media Institute to introduce high school teachers and students to media studies and careers, and will help media professionals stay current through its newly created Media Continuing Education Institute.

The strength of the journalism, broadcasting, and debate programs at WKU is already recognized nationally. School and Center director Jo-Ann Albers won the national Freedom Forum Award for Journalism Administrator of the Year last fall. In April this year WKU became the first Kentucky university to win the Hearst Foundation Intercollegiate Journalism Competition (in a field of one hundred schools), having placed third in 1998-1999 and in the top ten for the last five years. In the photojournalism division of the Hearst competition, WKU has won eleven consecutive times. The student staff of the *College Heights Herald* won the national Gold Crown Award from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association in 1999 and 2000 and won its seventh Pacemaker Award from the Associated Collegiate Press in November 1999. The debate team placed first in the International Forensic Association World Championship in Paris, France, this March and also in Rome, Italy, in March 1999. Broadcasting students won Student Emmy Awards in 1991, 1994, and 1997, while advertising students have advanced to the finals of the National Student Advertising Competition six times in the past eleven years. WKU has won many additional honors in these fields.

The Center will consist of five bachelor's degree programs (advertising, broadcasting, photojournalism, print journalism, and public relations) plus forensics, The Mountain Workshops in photojournalism, WKU's student radio station (WWHR-FM), a student-directed public relations agency, and a student-directed advertising agency. WKU has chosen not to offer a master's degree as part of the program of distinction because it wants the Center to focus exclusively on undergraduates and because it wishes to avoid unnecessary duplication. WKU will encourage Center graduates to pursue master's degrees in the WKU Department of Communication or elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

The Center's focus on undergraduates will further the School of Journalism and Broadcasting's strengths in mentoring, career placement, and practice-based curricula. "We practice what we teach" is the School's credo, which helps explain why most faculty have extensive professional experience in their fields (and why only 38 percent hold doctorates, since a Ph.D. is not the terminal degree in many practice-based pre-professional disciplines such as journalism and broadcasting). The Center will seek to increase by 10 percent the number of students enrolled and graduated by 2003-2004 and will concentrate particularly on out-of-state and minority students. The Center will offer scholarships totaling \$32,500 in 2000-2001, reaching \$70,000 annually by 2002-2003.

In 2002-2003 the Center will move into a new facility, for which the General Assembly appropriated \$18.5 million during the 1998 session (construction is scheduled to begin this fall).

WKU has established assessment criteria for the Center relating to professional out-of-classroom student activities, job placement, student-body diversity, continued student success in national and international competitions, and the impact of outreach to high schools and continuing education in relevant workplaces. The Council staff will evaluate the Center at least once every two years, beginning in the spring of 2001.

Funding Summary

WKU will over-match the \$500,000 from the Trust Fund with \$533,350 from external sources and internal reallocation in 1999-2000. Council staff members have worked with WKU senior administration to verify that required matching funds are available to support the Center.

WKU has a five-year budget plan for the Center in which non-recurring revenues and expenses will be steadily replaced by recurring revenues and expenses. The Center will use the money from the trust fund primarily to support the addition of three faculty and three staff and the purchase of new computer equipment, for example, to increase the number of workstations from 80 to 140.

After financing the creation of the Center, WKU will have \$373,000 remaining in its share of the Regional University Excellence Trust Fund.

Staff Preparation by Daniel A. Rabuzzi